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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003942

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE, DKAGAN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [IT](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: CAREFUL USG-GOI COORDINATION ESSENTIAL ON ITALIAN
TROOP CONTRIBUTION

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REF: A. A) ROME 3795

[B](#). B) STATE 134761

CLASSIFIED BY: ACTING DCM THOMAS COUNTRYMAN FOR REASONS 1.5(B)(D)

[1](#)1. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST. PLEASE SEE PARA 3.

[1](#)2. (C) WE UNDERSTAND FROM E-MAIL TRAFFIC THAT THE USG PREFERS TO ACCEPT ITALY'S OFFER OF TROOPS FOR OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) RATHER THAN THE GOI'S OFFER TO BACKFILL IN THE BALKANS (REF A). IT WILL TAKE CAREFUL HANDLING BY PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI AND DEFENSE MINISTER MARTINO TO SHEPHERD THIS THROUGH PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTATIONS.

WITH BERLUSCONI AND MANY SENIOR DECISION-MAKERS OUT OF ROME ON HOLIDAY, A GOI "GAME-PLAN" MAY TAKE SOME TIME TO ORCHESTRATE. THE NEED TO PLAN -- AND IMPLEMENT -- A POLITICAL STRATEGY MAY EXPLAIN WHY NO SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS HAVE BEEN ISSUED THROUGH THE MOD CHAIN OF COMMAND REGARDING BERLUSCONI'S CONDITIONAL DECISION TO CONTRIBUTE TROOPS. THE OPPOSITION, PRESS AND PUBLIC COULD EASILY MISINTERPRET USG-GOI PRELIMINARY STEPS TO COORDINATE ITALIAN PARTICIPATION AS AN ATTEMPT BY THE GOI TO CIRCUMVENT PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW -- AND ITALY'S OPPOSITION, WHICH LACKS MANY ISSUES IT CAN USE AGAINST THE POPULAR PRIME MINISTER, WOULD BE ONLY TOO EAGER TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY. THIS COULD CREATE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL FALL-OUT FOR BERLUSCONI, EVEN ULTIMATELY DERAILING THE OFFER TO CONTRIBUTE. DUE TO THE EXTREMELY SENSITIVE NATURE OF THIS ISSUE POLITICALLY WITHIN ITALY, WE URGE CAREFUL, COMPREHENSIVE AND QUIET USG-GOI COORDINATION, AND EMPHASIZE THAT THE GOI OFFER REMAINS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY PARLIAMENT WHEN IT RECONVENES IN

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MID-SEPTEMBER. IN ADDITION, WE SHOULD NOT ASSUME AT THIS POINT THAT THE GREEN LIGHT WE RECEIVED FROM BERLUSCONI EXTENDS BEYOND THE REQUEST FOR GROUND TROOPS OR SPECIAL OPS FORCES SPECIFIED IN REF B. IN PARTICULAR, ALL USG AGENCIES SHOULD AVOID PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF ITALIAN PARTICIPATION IN ORDER TO AVOID COMPLICATING THE GOI'S MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC REACTION. WE SHOULD NOT BE THE ONES TO ANNOUNCE ITALY'S COOPERATION.

[1](#)3. (C) EMBASSY IS INFORMED THAT A REQUEST FOR FORCES IS BEING PREPARED IN COORDINATION WITH THE ITALIAN LNO CELL AT CENTCOM THAT INCLUDES NOT ONLY THE FORCES REQUESTED IN REF B, WHICH BERLUSCONI HAS APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE, BUT ALSO ENGINEERS AND DEMINERS. IN REF A, GOI OFFICIALS ASKED FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF WHICH FORCES, AND FOR WHAT MISSION, THE USG IS SEEKING FROM ITALY. WE PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE FOR DELIVERY TO OFFICIALS AT MOD, MFA AND IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE:

-- OUR REQUEST: THE USG IS REQUESTING THAT ITALY CONTRIBUTE A LIGHT INFANTRY MANEUVER BATTALION, EQUIPPED WITH LIGHT RECONNAISSANCE/SECURITY VEHICLES, TO REPLACE A COALITION BATTALION DUE TO ROTATE OUT OF AFGHANISTAN.

-- THE MISSION: THE PROPOSED MISSION FOR THE ITALIAN BATTALION IS SENSITIVE SITE EXPLORATION, TIME-SENSITIVE TARGET POST-STRIKE EXPLOITATION, SUPPORT TO HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS, AIRFIELD SECURITY, AREA RECONNAISSANCE AND COMBAT OPERATIONS TO DESTROY AL-QAIDA/TALIBAN FORCES. SPECIFIC BASING LOCATION FOR ITALIAN FORCES IS TO BE DETERMINED.

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-- TIMING: THE PROPOSED MISSION DURATION IS FROM JANUARY THROUGH JULY 2003, WITH EXTENSION OR BACKFILL IF POSSIBLE BEYOND JULY 2003.

ACTION REQUEST. PLEASE CONFIRM THAT THIS BRIEF STATEMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE MORE DETAILED RFF BEING PREPARED. ADDITIONALLY, IF THE USG WANTS TO SPECIFY ALPINI FORCES OR REQUEST ENGINEERS, MINE CLEARING UNITS, SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNITS AND/OR OTHER MILITARY ASSETS, PLEASE INCLUDE IN A PRIORITIZED LIST COORDINATED WITH DEFENSE AND STATE. IF THE NUMBER OF FORCES NEEDED IS AVAILABLE, PLEASE PROVIDE.

EMBASSY ROME CAN THEN APPROACH GOI POLITICAL AND MILITARY
DECISION-MAKERS WITH A COMPREHENSIVE REQUEST FOR ASSETS IN
SUPPORT OF OEF.

14. (C) WE ARE ENCOURAGING THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND THE
DEFENSE MINISTER'S OFFICE TO CONVEY THE PRIME MINISTER'S
DECISION TO CONTRIBUTE FORCES (SUBJECT TO PARLIAMENTARY
REVIEW) TO THE UNIFORMED STAFF AND THE CENTCOM LNO CELL.
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